

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Introduction

At the direction of the Borough Council of the Borough of Chambersburg, I was assigned the task of reviewing the current state of matters as relates to the fire protection services in the Borough, both volunteer and paid. Emphasis was placed on a review of the existing volunteer services. My assignment was to review the existing fire companies, membership levels, financial issues and the impact of these and related issues on the Borough of Chambersburg. I was asked to provide my findings and recommendations to Council.

In order to provide this report I conducted an in-person interview with a representative (or two) of each company. I asked a standard set of questions at each interview. Follow-up questions were asked as necessary, based on responses to the standard questionnaire. I was provided with certain additional information on each company either at or following the interview. I also interviewed the Chambersburg Fireman's Relief Association, representatives from the Fire Police and the individual largely responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the Fire Museum.

I would like to publically thank all the interviewees for their candid responses and cooperation in these interviews. It was apparent that there was concern within the companies about my work, but everyone I interviewed seemed to understand that the Borough was facing difficult economic times and needed to address the issue of fire protection of the Borough along with all other Borough services.

### Recommendations

Based upon these interviews, the following are my recommendations, by category. (A more detailed discussion with factual background and analysis is available in the full report.)

#### Finance

**(1) Request Fire Relief to perform an audit of all funds, to be performed by a certified public accountant. In addition, request Fire Relief undertake an actuarial determination of the amount needed in reserve for payment of the death benefit and investigate the purchase of a group life insurance policy to provide the same benefit without the necessity of holding a large reserve.**

Fire Relief has in excess of \$1,000,000 of public money in its control. There is no outside oversight of these funds. The funds are invested (at least in part) in stocks and bonds. Fire Relief rarely spends all the money it 'earns' in any year (from annual payments and interest income) and it is maintaining an excessive cash reserve for the payment of death benefits to members. Prudent fiscal policy is for such an organization to perform a full audit on a regular basis to identify actual or potential problems with the funds or the money management, investment and reserve procedures. Not undertaking an audit is poor management of public funds.

- (2) Change the billing policies of the Borough for the provision of EMS services, including non-transport services.**

The Borough currently does not bill at all for any EMS call made by the Borough that does not involve the transport of a patient to the hospital. A review of the Borough billing policies should be undertaken to make sure that the Borough is billing for all the services and reimbursements available to it under the insurance programs.

**Assets**

- (3) Remove the three pieces of antique equipment from the private storage location and obtain insurance on the vehicles.**

Ideally, this recommendation would be accomplished by the transfer of the vehicle titles from the CV's ownership to the Borough and then storage on Borough property. This would permit the inclusion of the equipment on the Borough's general insurance policy.

- (4) Return the property at 441 Broad Street (the existing Fire Museum) to ownership of the Borough.**

The property is currently in a terrible state of repair and it is not now operating as a museum. The reverter clause in the deed permits the Borough to retake possession. As a result, the real estate can be included on the Borough's property insurance and the contents will be insured as well.

- (5) Consideration should be given to adding another EMS vehicle and crew – especially after the implementation of the change in #2 above.**

EMS services are currently a profit center for the Borough. Assuming that recommendation #2 is adopted and the Borough begins to bill for all services provided, adding another EMS vehicle and crew will provide even more revenue to the Borough.

**Fire Company Issues**

- (6) Combine the Cumberland Valley Hose and Fire, the Good Will Fire Company and the Junior Hose and Truck Company to create a new 'legacy' company.**

This new legacy company would not be an active volunteer fire company, but would be a volunteer organization that would protect the history and legacy of the fire services in Chambersburg. The focus of this legacy company would be educational – to provide speakers, make presentations, attend parades (in operable antique fire vehicles wherever possible) and assist in the recruitment of new volunteer firemen. Members of the legacy company would be ambassadors for the fire services. The funds and other assets from the three companies could be transferred to this new entity and employed for the express purpose of maintaining the historical equipment and furthering the educational and recruitment purposes of the legacy company.

- (7) Instruct the Chief of Police and the Fire Chief to come to some sort of understanding regarding the use (or not) of the Fire Police within the Borough. Establish protocols that will apply to Borough Police when they are called to a fire site.**

The Fire Chief does not now use the Fire Police service within the Borough. He believes that the traffic control function is more professionally accomplished by Borough police, leading to a far more

organized and safer fire scene for everyone. Borough Police officers must be instructed as to their role in fire emergencies and the extreme importance of the traffic control function in such situations.

**(8) Determine the legal status of the Fire Police.**

I was not able to find any documentation of the separate legal status of the Fire Police.

**(9) Advise all volunteer companies, the Fire Relief and the Fire Police that they are all public agencies under the definition of the Commonwealth Right to Know/Open Records Law. Provide education and training in what will (and won't) be required to be disclosed under the law and the correct procedure for handling these requests.**

While these organizations are all subject to the public disclosure requirements of the Right to Know Law, not all of the information they may have is available for public disclosure. The finances of the organization are public information and should be disclosed if requested. All companies need to be aware of the requirements and should establish a method to insure that they meet the requirements.

**(10) Determine the appetite of the Borough and all the volunteer companies (including the new legacy company) to continue to operate a museum, to include a financial commitment to its renovation, upkeep and staffing. If there is not sufficient interest or money, bring in an auctioneer and sell the assets with the proceeds going to the Borough Fire Department.**

The scope and magnitude of the historical items owned by the legacy companies cannot be overstated. However, they are not being properly maintained. They are not easily available to the public. They are not being used as a recruitment tool for the volunteers. They have significant value that should be realized – either through use for the betterment of the Borough fire services or by revenue generated through sale.

**(11) It should be suggested that the surviving volunteer companies create two categories of members – social and firefighter to clarify eligibility of Fire Relief member benefits.**

The suggestion is not meant to eliminate non-fire fighters from eligibility for disability or death benefits. Some distinction in benefit eligibility schedules should be created between social and firefighting members so that firefighting members become eligible for full benefits more quickly than social members or may be eligible for additional benefits.

**(12) The relationship between the Borough Fire Department and the Franklin Fire Company should be improved and formalized in an agreement to allocate resources and duty responsibilities between the entities.**

With the creation of the new legacy company to maintain historical consistency, those members of the former Good Will, Junior and Cumberland Valley fire companies who are fire fighters will have to become part of another volunteer company. The Borough should ask Franklin to accept these firefighters into its ranks as full members, without the need of approval or additional application or review. This permits the better allocation of manpower and resources between all the stations to improve coverage and eliminate overlap. In exchange for this agreement, the Borough can agree to provide Franklin with certain funds or manpower, especially drivers and ambulance services.

**(13) Fire Relief should be encouraged to develop a more coordinated approach to training local firefighters. Also, Fire Relief should request clarification from the Department of Community & Economic Development (DCEC) as to when its funds may be used for equipment purchases in a part-paid, part-volunteer company.**

As I discussed training with all the companies, I was struck by how much training was available to the volunteers, yet, how difficult it seemed to be for the volunteers to accomplish the training. Fire Relief should be encouraged to establish a complete training schedule for all the trainings that they will provide locally. Fire Relief should also consider requesting the local colleges create a for-credit course for firefighting. In addition, Fire Relief training policies should be clearly stated and disseminated to all members of all companies. The issue of Fire Relief expenditures for equipment to be used by the Chambersburg Fire Department (part paid and part volunteer) issue should be examined further so that the Fire Relief resources can be better used by Chambersburg for some of its equipment needs.

### **Workers Compensation**

**(14) The Borough should become involved with the Borough Association to urge the legislature to modify the workers' compensation obligations in order to permit the Borough to create requirements that must be met before workers' compensation coverage will be provided.**

The issue of the requirements for the provision of workers' compensation coverage is not unique to the Borough. The Boroughs Association should be encouraged to adopt this issue on behalf of its members and the Borough should become actively involved.

**(15) As a result of the recent change to the workers' compensation coverage, the Borough should consider providing physical examinations for all active firefighters who may not yet have had a physical to establish the current condition of the firefighter, in case of a subsequent workers' compensation claim.**

New firefighters (whether volunteer or paid) all receive a physical examination before they are accepted into the fire service. However, a physical examination should be provided to every firefighter who has not yet had one to establish their current baseline condition as a way to mitigate exposure under the new cancer claim provision.

**(16) The Borough should seek reimbursement for the costs of workers' compensation coverage with neighboring municipalities who primarily benefit from the volunteer fire services as authorized under state law.**

The Borough currently pays all workers compensation costs of all firefighters located within the Borough limits, however, many of these firefighters, especially the Franklins and the Friendship (who provide no service within the Borough), primarily serve neighboring municipalities. Under §1032 of the Workers' Compensation Act, the cost of this coverage shall be shared by the municipalities that actually receive service from the volunteer companies based in the Borough. The Borough should bill the neighboring communities for their fair share contributions of workers' compensation costs in accordance with the provisions of §1032.